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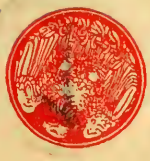

Uncle Amos and His Christmas Gifts

BY

Mary D. Brine

"Ho! for the Merry Christmas time!
When Hearts must Sing
And bells must Chime!"

UNCLE AMOS

AND HIS

CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

ILLUSTRATED.

—BY—

MRS MARY D. BRINE,

Author of "Grandma's Attic Treasures," "From Gold to Grey," etc., etc.

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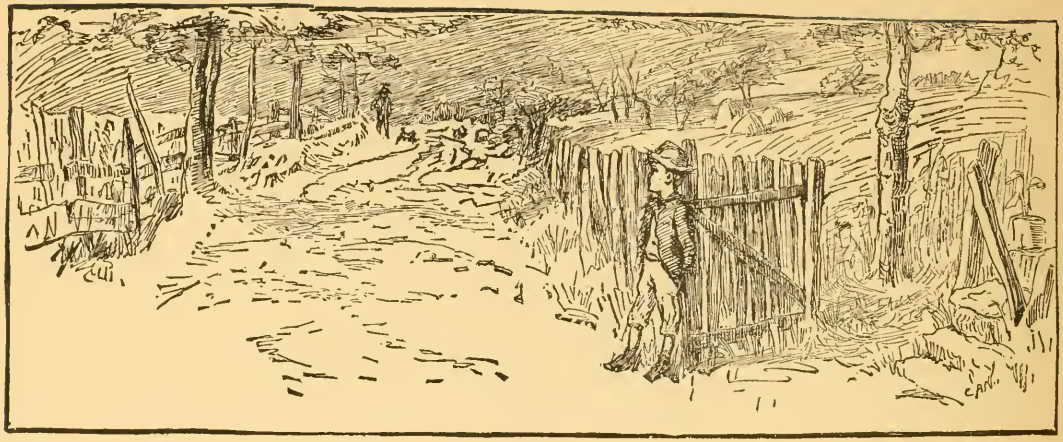
All through the day the wind and rain
Had driven o'er each street and lane
Of our big city, till at last
The twilight shadows gathered fast.
And twinkling through the gloom about
The misty city lights shone out;
Some from the homes where love and peace
Would help discomfort quickly cease;
Some from the homes where hand in hand
Grim poverty and pain would stand;
And some, alas! from haunts where men
Forged for their woes new chains again.
Amid the crowd that jostled by,
With tired feet and stifled sigh,
Went Bennie Moore, a blue-eyed lad,
The only joy his mother had.
She was a widow. Day by day

She sewed her health and strength away,
While her young son, with anxious heart,
To help her bravely tried his part.
And walked the busy city through,
Seeking some work to find and do.
Yet search was vain. Men said that he
Looked weak an "errand-boy" to be;
Looked sick and small; in fact they had
No jobs to give so young a lad.
And so with each discouraged night
Came tears to dim the blue eyes' light,
While Bennie in his heart would say,
"Please, Lord, *do* help mamma, I pray!"
All through this day of chilling rain
The boy had tried and tried again
"Odd jobs" to find, of any kind—
Or hard or light, he would not mind.
But now, still empty-handed, he
Went shivering homeward, wearily,
The earnest question on his tongue,

"Mamma, *is* nine years old too young
For work?" "Dear child," she answered, "you
Are not as strong—alas, 'tis true—
As many other boys you meet
Each day upon the busy street.
Be patient till you're older grown,
Then Mother will not toil alone."
So little Bennie's heart grew sore.
He pondered his grave question o'er,
Till suddenly a happy thought
By his quick, eager brain was caught.
Nor did he let it go till he
Had studied it most thoroughly.
He knew—what little boy does not?—
Of that most fascinating spot
Called "Country." Every dear child knows
It is a lovely place that grows
Outside of city walls and lies
All free beneath the distant skies.
Our Bennie had no map to trace

A town, locality or place;
He only knew that *somewhere* grew
High hills, and happy valleys, too.
He only longed, with all his heart,
From city ways and woes to part;
To go where boys were not so many
And *he* could earn an honest penny.
All night he pondered on his plan
Till morning came. Dear little man!
How quick his tongue found leave to speak,
When mother's kiss was on his cheek:
"Mother, dear Mother, I must go!"
He plead; "for in my heart I know
That some kind farmer will employ
And find *some* errands for your boy.
Then when the Christmas time shall come
I'll bring my earnings safely home;
And you and I, O Mother dear,
Will have a happy Christmas cheer"
"Ah, Bennie, no!" she sadly said.

But Bennie, as she shook her head,
Fell back upon his last resource.
"Now look at me, mamma, of course,
I shall be growing strong and well
In the fresh air. You cannot tell
How sure I am that it will be
The very best of things for me."
His mother gazed upon him there.
The little face was far too fair
For perfect health, and well she knew
The shadow in those eyes so blue.
"Can it be God's own plan," thought she,
"Which, though it take my child from me
Yet offers health and strength to him?
Dare I refuse?" Her eyes grew dim.
She laid her hand upon his head.
"God bless you, Bennie, go!" she said.



Old Amos Green came up the hill
From his broad meadow land below,
Just as the setting sun had shed
O'er hill and dale its crimson glow.
The farmer whistled as he walked,
And to his shepherd dog he talked
With kindly notice. "Shep, old boy,
Life after all is full of joy,
If folks would only look about
An' try to pick its comforts out,
Instead o' grumblin' day by day,

'Cause things don't always go their way."
Shep wagged his tail, then paused to hark;
Pricked up his ears, and with a bark
Went bounding forward to the gate,
Where he had seen a figure wait.
A little figure, thinly clad,
A tired, yet a hopeful lad;
For on the farmer's sunburned face,
Surprise to kindly smiles gave place.
"Why, bless my soul! who have we here?"
Then Bennie, without shame or fear,
Told who he was, and whence he came;
Showed his small feet, so bruised and lame,
From climbing hills, and walking o'er
Long roads he ne'er had seen before—
Told also *why* he'd come away
From home, in a strange place to stay.
"I've stopped at many a house to see
If anybody wanted me;
But I'm too little. Don't folks know

That little boys can *bigger* grow?"
He stopped and laid his soft, pale cheek
On Shep's broad head. Shep couldn't speak,
But with his eyes he seemed to say:
"Master, don't send the boy away."
"Well, lad, what is it you would do?"
Asked Farmer Green. "Stay here with you,
And do odd jobs and things. You'll see
How useful I will try to be,"
Was Bennie's eager answer, while
He lightened 'neath the old man's smile.
"Please, sir, I'm tired with my walk,
And most too tired to even talk!"
Then came the farmer's sister, Prue—
(Beloved of children were those two,
Who in their cheerful home together
Had bravely shared life's changeful weather;—
Those two alone, and loving all
Young folks around, or large or small,
Were lovingly by children claimed,

And, "Uncle," "Auntie," they were named.)
She came, Aunt Prue, and laid her hand
On Bennie's brow. "We understand,
Poor little boy! Don't tremble so!
Amos, we'll need his help, I know,
As little chore boy. Surely we
Won't grudge the pay to such as he."
Now fancy little Ben, each day,
His young heart growing light and gay,
And more than that, so grateful, too,
For all the work he found to do;
"And, dear mamma, it's so much better
(He told his mother in his letter),
"To live up here where fields are wide,
And there is lots of sky, beside;
And where I know, that every day,
It is for you I earn my pay.
My farmer is so kind to me!
I call him Uncle Amos—he
Is that to all the children here,

I'm sure you'd love him, mother dear!"
All this, and more beside, did Ben
In his own fashion write; and then
The kind old farmer dropped it in
The mail-box with a merry grin,
To think how Bennie little knew
That with it went—a "greenback," too.
Well, days slipped by, and Amos Green,
As it was plainly to be seen,
Grew very fond of Ben, the while
Aunt Prue's devotion made him smile.
"You'll spoil the boy!" he often cried.
"No less will you!" Aunt Prue replied.
And Ben, except for missing mother,
Preferred this home to any other.
November's reign was o'er at last;
The "holidays" were coming fast.
Each week Ben dropped his pennies in
The little savings bank of tin;
Each week he felt its weight again.

'Twas growing heavier, that was plain.
How far, how very far away
To Bennie seemed that dismal day
Of wind and rain, the last one he
Had walked the streets so tearfully;
Because he tried the long day through
And had not found a "job" to do!
Since then how happy he had grown,
And how the days had fairly flown
With all the chores he had on hand!
(He ne'er was idle, understand,
While yet one duty was undone
Before the setting of the sun.)
He helped the farmer feed the cows,
And helped to turn them out to browse;
He took the horse to water, then
Rode bare-back to the barn again;
He fed the chickens every day,
And hunted for the eggs so white,
And fed the great white pig, and oh!

So busy he from morn till night,
That Auncle Amos used to say,
"I tell you, Ben, I do not know
How I could run this farm if *you*
Were not on hand to run it too."
At Christmas-time Ben meant to be
With his mamma again. But she,
Still anxious for his health, wrote, "No.
Stay till the cold winds cease to blow."
Then, thoughtful, loving Auntie Prue
Said, "Ben, I'll tell you what we'll do.
Send on your money. Don't you see
What a nice Christmas-gift 'twill be
For mother from her boy? And more
You'll earn before the winter's o'er.
At Christmas I will give for you
A little party. Just a few
Of happy children gathered here
To help you taste of Christmas cheer."
"A Christmas party?" Bennie's eyes

Grew sunny as the sunniest skies.
He'd heard of such, poor little boy!
But ne'er had tasted of the joy
Which Christmas pleasures ever bring
To homes where life's best sunbeams cling.
And so he counted patiently,
The days ere Christmas-time should be,
And every evening brought his books
With willing heart and cheery looks
To study with kind Auntie Prue,
And practice up his writing too;
For very glad was she, indeed,
To help him in his every need,
Well satisfied when on her cheek
He'd *kiss* the thanks he could not speak.

Ho! for the merry Christmas-time!
When hearts must sing and bells must chime!
Our Bennie at the peep of day
Threw drowsy thoughts far, far away,
And at the window stood to see
The rising sun so gloriously
Proclaim to all the listening earth,
"This is the day of Jesus' birth!"
Into his clothes he scrambled fast,
And down the stairs he flew at last;
Cried, "Merry Christmas!" to Aunt Prue,
The same to Auncle Amos too;
Then out across the barnyard, where
He rang his greetings on the air,
That all his farmyard pets might know
What made his heart with pleasure glow.
Throwing the barn doors open wide,

He poked his curly head inside.
"A Merry Christmas, good old Grey!"
The mare responded with a neigh,
And Bennie standing on his toes,
Kissed lovingly her soft brown nose.
Now then, the first thing I will do
Must be to find for Auntie Prue
Some eggs for that big pudding she
Is going to make to-day for me;
Oh! shan't I have"—alas! what thought
In Bennie's heart just then was born
To drive the sunshine from his eyes,
And make him sad that merry morn?
He knew his mother thought of him,
In her poor home, with eyes so dim
With unshed tears, she scarce could see
The work she sewed so wearily.
No happy Christmas day for her;
No joy to make her pulses stir
As Bennie's did, nor to her share

Would fall *his* sumptuous Christmas fare.
What wonder that all signs of joy
Fled from the blue eyes of her boy!
"But *she has got my money now!*"
(Back rolled the cloud from Bennie's brow,
While dimples gathered thick and fast).
"And I have helped mamma at last!"
Oh, cheering thought! Straighway our Ben
Became a merry boy again,
And when the party was begun,
No happier child beneath the sun
Could e'er be found than Bennie Moore,
Who played as he ne'er played before.
And oh! the dinner! there they sat,
The children—rosy-cheeked and fat.
Their appetites far more than able
To do full justice to the table.
While farmer Green and Auntie Prue
Helped them to eat and chatter, too.

Ho! for the garret dim and wide,
Cobwebbed with dust from side to side!
Thither the children, girls and boys,
Betook themselves and all their noise,
Intent upon a hunt throughout

The time-worn rubbish stored about.
What fun they had! and how they played
That they were pirates, making raid
Upon such prey as came their way.
Till Bennie, with a shout so gay
That it went ringing through and through
The house, and startled Auntie Prue
And Uncle Amos as they sat,
Having an after-dinner chat—
Discovered in an old-time chest
A little sailor suit. In jest
He slipped it on. "See, fellers, see!
It's almost little enough for me.
I'd like to be a sailor boy
And go to places far away,
And see such lots of curious things
As sailors see. I will some day.
My father was a sailor, he
Was fourteen when he went to sea.
I know, because he told me so.

But then, you see, he didn't go
As big men do. *He ran away*—
My father did, one summer day.
And left his home. I think that *I*
Would rather have stayed to say good-by.
He didn't though, he thought 'twas fun
To run away. The thing was done
Before he scarce had planned it, see?
He used to tell it all to me,
And then he'd look so sad, as though
Some things had grieved him long ago."
Now it had chanced that Bennie's shout
Had drawn the farmer from his chair,
And hastening to the garret stairs,
He paused awhile to listen there.
"For like as not some mischief they
Will do before the close of day."
Thought he, and standing there, had heard
Of Bennie's story every word.
And still he stood with his gray eyes

Grown wide with wonder and surprise.
While little Ben, in suit of blue,
Telling his story, little knew
Of the one auditor, unseen,
Whose listening ears grew sharp and keen.
Ben's little heart was stirred with pride,
As "Tell us more!" the children cried;
He loved to talk—they loved to listen.
And how his eyes began to glisten
As in his childish way he told
The story now to him so old.
"Well, papa used to tell to me,
How he grew tired of the sea,
And went back to his home again.
And stayed awhile, and then—and then
Some trouble came to him, and so
He wanted once again to go
Away from everybody, and
He did so. I don't understand
Exactly how it was, for he

Would often put me off his knee.
And up and down the floor would walk,
And stop me when I wished to talk."
The farmer's face grew sad and white,
He clenched his strong hands hard and tight:
Long years ago a wayward brother,
The youngest born—whose widowed mother
Had left him with a dying prayer
To brother's and to sister's care,—
Had quarreled with his brother's will,
And run away, alas! and still
The grief within the hearts he left
Was such as then. The home bereft
Of that young brother's form and face,
Still held for him a welcoming place
Should he return—though years had flown,
And of his life no word was known,
Till now, the elder brother heard
Through Bennie's lips, sad word by word,
Of him their love had borne in mind,

With thoughts so tender and so kind.
How plainly now could all be seen
By the excited Farmer Green!
His wandering brother's very name
He'd changed, that he might quit all claim
To the dear home, and none might know
Of him whose pride had fall'n so low.
But Bennie still talked on and told
How poor they were; so often cold
And hungry, too. "But yet," said he,
"Father was always kind to me
And my mamma!" "So kind," he cried,
Speaking the words with boyish pride
In that dear father's love, "that when
He died, we scare could smile again
For such a weary while: I *know*
That something vexed him long ago.
'Cause once I heard my mother say
'You'll see your home again some day.'
'I have no home save here with you,'

My father said; 'too proud am I
To turn to those I've hurt, and cry
After so many years, for aid!'
These are the very words he said."
With tears upon his sun-browned cheek,
Old Amos Green his sister sought.
"Come!" as she stared at him amazed,
"Come, see what this strange day has brought
To us." He led her tremblingly
Up the old stairs that she might see
The little "chore-boy" of the farm
Still in the sailor suit arrayed.
The farmer grasped his sister's arm.
"Speak, Prue, whose suit does Bennie wear?
She turned, and o'er her face a shade
Of anger passed. "How did they dare
To use *that* in their play?" she cried.
Old Amos drew her to his side.
"Our long lost brother, dear, is dead!
Ben *wears—his—father's suit!*" he said.

That night a happy little boy
Knelt down to pray in words of joy
And praise, to the good God above,
Out of a heart o'er full of love.
For had he not at Auntie's side,
Learned how the blessed Christmas-tide
Had given him a legal right
To love his new-found home so bright?
And listening to the sad, sweet tale
Of his dead father's boyish years.
What gift more treasured than the suit
Once laid away with many tears,
But which in merry, boyish play,
He'd proudly worn that Christmas day?
And think you it was long before
Ben saw his dear mamma once more?
Ah, no indeed! for Farmer Green
No moments wasted ere he came
To our big city one fine day
Another sister dear to claim.

He found her in her lonely room,
Just at the early twilight's gloom,
And gently broke the welcome news
To her whose her heart could not refuse
To listen and believe. She heard
Him through, and then at the last word
Fainted for joy, for she was weak,
E'en while her "*brother*" kissed her cheek.
But joy won't kill, they say, and so,

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Her tired heart put off its woe,
And all her cares and all her fears
Were washed away in happy tears.
No need to tell of the glad day
When Bennie, rosy-cheeked and gay,
Stretched out his arms mamma to greet,
And welcome with his kisses sweet
To the old home, where Auntie Prue
A *sister's* welcome tendered too.
No need to tell how Farmer Green—
The happiest "uncle" ever seen—
The joyous news spread far and wide,
With Ben (to help him) at his side.
But this I'll say, that to this day
Old Amos Green his full heart lifts
In loving gratitude for those
"*Most unexpected* Christmas gifts.'

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